

Giardiasis

Information Sheet

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. It is a very commonly reported cause of diarrhea illness. Cases may occur sporadically or in outbreaks.

Who gets Giardiasis?

Anyone can get Giardiasis, but it tends to occur more often in people in institutional settings, people in daycare centres, foreign travelers and individuals who consume improperly treated surface water (lakes, rivers, streams, etc.).

What are the symptoms of Giardiasis?

Many people with Giardiasis do not experience any symptoms. Those who become ill have symptoms that include mild to severe diarrhea, increased flatulence, abdominal cramps, weight loss and bloating. Fever is rarely present. The symptoms may appear from 3 to 25 days after exposure, but usually within 7 to 10 days.

How long can an infected person carry Giardiasis?

The carrier stage generally lasts from a few weeks to months. Treatment with specific antibiotics may shorten the carrier stage.

People with active diarrhea need to be excluded from settings where they may spread the illness, such as school, daycare centres or other group activities, until the diarrhea stops. In addition, some local health departments may require follow-up stool testing to confirm that the person can no longer spread the illness.

How is this parasite spread?

The Giardiasis parasite is passed in the faeces (stool) of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. It can also be spread by direct or indirect contact with faecal material from an infected person or animal. This may occur in daycare centres or in settings where hand washing practices are poor.

How to prevent the spread of Giardiasis

Important preventive measures are as follows:

- Wash hands thoroughly after toilet visits
- Avoid consuming improperly treated water. Emergency water supplies are best boiled for 20 minutes or longer if the water is cold and turbid, or treated with hypochlorite or iodine (2 to 4 drops of household bleach or 0.5 ml of 2 percent tincture of iodine per quart).